DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 127 395 UD 016 218

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TITLE The Pilipino American.
INSTITUTION Los Angeles County Commission on Human Rights, Calif.
PUB DATE Mar 76
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Asian Americans; *Cultural Background; Cultural Context; Cultural Differences; Cultural Environment; Cultural Exchange; Cultural Images; Cultural Pluralism; *Ethnic Groups; *Filipinc Americans; Group Behavior; *Group Norms; Group Relations; Group Status; *Immigrants; Minority Groups; Social Values

ABSTRACT

The Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations presents here a brief overview of the Pilipino American experience and orientation to aid in understanding. Included are historical facts and also more personal statements. Among the minorities of the Los Angeles County, the Pilipino population is notable for its large proportion of new comers. There have been three waves of immigrants and presently they are immigrating in greater numbers than any other Asian group and will outnumber both Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans if the 1970 immigration rate continues. At the core of Pilipino social interactions is the maintenance of personal pride, dignity and esteem, and the avoidance of shame. Harmony among persons is also a fundamental value among Pilipinos. For Pilipinos, the family is the center of personal commitment. It is an extended family including not only parents and children but also grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Although Spanish rule of the Philippines encouraged dominance by men, the position of Pilipino women has been one of strength. Among Pilipinos, respect is linked to age and not sex. Another cultural feature, one which governs relationships outside extended family circles, is the practice of reciprocity; a favor done by one member of a family puts all family members in good standing with the debtor. The family, as well as being the primary social unit is also the primary unit of economics. (Author/AM)

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ED127395

THE PILIPINO AMERICAN

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The cover design, by Faustino Caigoy, depicts the flight of the mythical bird Ibong Nadarana to a new land and a better life. The moon/sun represents mood composed of contrasts. The flight takes a cross-like form which suggests hope. In some parts of the Philippines the mythical bird is called Sari-Manok.

THE PILIPINO* AMERICAN**

Two major sources of conflict and human hurt between races and ethnic groups are discriminatory practices (sometimes in the form of laws) and faulty communications. Pilipino American have suffered from both. The Los Angeles County Commission or Human Relations presents here a brief overview of the Pilipino American experience and orientation to aid in cross-cultural understanding. We will include historical facts and also more personal statements.

There is, in any such undertaking, the danger that the generalizations may be used as yet another stereotype. It is the responsibility of the reader to keep constantly in mind the diversity and complexity of humans, whatever their heritage. We must resist the temptation to seek simple answers where there are no simple answers.

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*We spell "Pilipino" with a "p" and not an "f" to better reflect that people. There is no "f" in the Pilipino language. The "f" sound reflects the Spanish influence and has been used as an accommodation to Westerners. "Filipino" continues to be used; "Pilipino" is used increasingly.

**We have used the term "Pilipino" when referring to traditional attitudes and values which Pilipino Americans retain from their Pilipino heritage. It is also used here to refer to people who would identify themselves as Pilipinos--such as farm laborers who intended to return home to the Philippine Islands.

THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES

Among the minorities of this County, the Pilipino American population is notable for its large proportion of newcomers. There are fewer generations of Pilipino Americans than of Japanese Americans or Chinese Americans, for example, since the Pilipino immigration to the U.S. began later. For this reason, it is appropriate to begin with a look at the people of the Philippines. (Because our concern is with a people and not a political entity, we make references here to "the Philippines" rather than to "The Republic of the Philippines.")

Of all the Pacific and Asian peoples, the Pilipinos are the most westernized. They are also distinguished by their Spanish surnames and their predominantly Christian (Roman Catholic) faith. The other sizable religious influence in the Philippines is Islamic. Their heritage includes Negrito (aboriginal), Indo-Malayan-Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Spanish and American influences.

Their diversity, in a nation only as large as New England plus New York, has been sustained in part because theirs is a nation of islands. Their skin may be almost any shade. They have been described as small and slender and graceful; but young Pilipinos and Pilipino Americans, like young Americans of other parentage, frequently tower over their parents.

The national Pilipino language is based on the Tagalog dialect. The dialects of most Pilipinos fall into eight major groups, by region. While persons who speak different dialects within a single regional group can understand one another, they cannot understand persons of another regional group. It is no wonder that regional identity is strong among Pilipinos.

English is widely used in the Philippines; Spanish, less widely. The English spoken by Pilipinos may be heavily accented and may contain colloquial expressions different from those of American English. It may also seem halting to Americans. The Pilipino language is elaborate and precise, while American English is not. A Pilipino's search for the best English words may result in pauses. It is a grave mistake to conclude that a speaker lacks intelligence or is uneducated because he is unfamiliar with slang terms, speaks hesitantly, or speaks with an accent. These characteristics indicate language differences, not mental capacity or scholarship.

The economy of the Philippines is basically agricultural and the lifestyle geared to nature -- the birth, growth and death of living things, the seasons, the unchanging landscapes. While most Pilipino immigrants to the United States have some experience in cities, their roots are not likely to be urban. In personal terms, a move to Los Angeles County means exposure to a hectic life, where distance is measured in freeway minutes and everyone hurries from here to there.

THREE WAVES OF IMMIGRANTS

Pilipino Americans were the third largest Pacific and Asian American population group of the 1970 U.S. Census. Pilipinos are immigrating in greater numbers than any other Asian group and will soon outnumber both Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans if the 1970 immigration rate continues.

There have been three major waves of immigration from the Philippine Islands to the United States. The first was composed of farm workers in the 1920's and 1930's; the second, of World War II veterans and their families; and third wave, currently

underway, of professionals. Great numbers of Pilipinos have applied for entry. Those of certain professions are being given preference by this government. Prior to 1920 a small number of Pilipinos came here as students. Then, about 1920, anticipating a "Gentleman's Agreement" that would restrict the entry of Japanese field workers on whom they depended, American farmers began to import Pilipinos to the mainland United States. (Recruitment to work in Hawaii had begun about 1906.) When all other Asian immigration was barred in 1924, immigration of Pilipinos expanded to meet the demand for laborers. Most were employed in agriculture, fishing and fish canning, and domestic and personal services.

"Pinoy" (Pē-noi´) became the slang word for Pilipino immigrant worker. Today "Pinoy" and "Pinay" (Pē-nī´) are more broadly applied to Pilipino Americans in general. To some, especially the young, they have good connotations of shared roots and identity, a warm human bond.

The farm worker wave consisted of men only. They came to work, to make a financial success, and then to return home in triumph. They did work, for miserable wages; and they sent home more money than they could spare. Many sent home glowing success stories, rather than admit defeat. We will have more to say about the Pilipino sense of self-esteem later.

Like the Chinese and Japanese laborers who preceded them, Pilipino immigrants were socially and politically rejected and economically exploited. They were feared and hated as competitors for jobs, even though they usually held the most menial jobs, and at the lowest wages. As late as 1970 the percentage of Pilipino American men in low-skilled, low-

paying jobs was double that of the total U.S. male population.* During the depression years Pilipinos were blamed for unemployment and poor wages. Public sentiment against Pilipinos became so great that in 1935 the U.S. government offered them a free ride back to the Philippines. Acceptance of the offer, however, carried with it the forfeit of all re-entry rights.

STABILITY WAS PROHIBITED

Those who chose to stay (and most did) were prevented by laws from putting down roots here. Until 1948 intermarriage with whites was prohibited in California. (Since there were few Pilipino women here, this law severely limited the establishment of stable families.) Ownership of any property was prohibited. Citizenship was denied. The Pilipinos were allowed only to be a labor force, moving up and down the Pacific coastline.

CITIZENSHIP VIA THE NAVY

Until the Independence of the Philippine Islands in 1946 Pilipino Americans were technically neither citizens, nor aliens, nor wards of the government. They were "nationals." The congressional act granting independence to the Philippines made Pilipinos eligible for U.S. citizenship; but it also imposed a miniscule yearly immigration quota of fifty persons. From 1925 to 1946 the only sure way to American citizenship for a Pilipino was through military service. Today there is a concentration of Pilipino Americans in the Long Beach/Wilmington/San Pedro area as evidence of the fact. In the

*U.S. Census, 1970, males 16 years and older.

Philippines Navy families enjoy relative status and steady income There they were able to afford domestic help -- a benefit which sometimes became a liability in adjusting to life here.

The other major area of Pilipino American settlements is in the vicinity of Temple Street and Beverly Boulevard, just west of Los Angeles civic center. Offices and facilities of the Pilipino American organizations, and apartments (often just hotel rooms) of senior citizens are located there. The homes of most Pilipino Americans, however, are dispersed throughout the County and beyond.

Harmony among persons is a fundamental value among Pilipinos. Minor differences are not considered worth fighting over. Yet, Pilipinos esteem courage and scorn cowardice. The bravery of Pilipinos during World War II did much to combat the anti-Pilipino sentiment which had existed among Americans.

THE AVOIDANCE OF SHAME

At the very core of Pilipino social interactions is the maintenance of personal pride, dignity and esteem, and the avoidance of shame. The concept is far more complex than the English word "shame." Rebuke is felt deeply; embarrassment is painful. Criticism of an act is criticism of the person. Failure or defeat is disgrace. Any reprimand, however slight, in the presence of others, is humiliating. This sensitivity extends not only to direct censure but even to criticism which is masked with humor or couched in generalized terms.

This regard for personal esteem is a very important consideration in Pilipino decision making. An American employer might promote one man because of his productivity and use the occasion

to prod the other candidates toward better work. This would be contrary to Pilipino tradition. The Pilipino employer would take into account the ego needs of the employees in his decision and in his announcements.

CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT

For Pilipinos the family is the center of personal commitment. It is an extended family including not only parents and children, but also grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. An offense to any member of the family is an offense against all members

Besides relatives by birth and marriage, others may be taken into this close circle through ritual kinship (godparents), although such ties are not as close among Pilipino Americans as among traditional Pilipinos. As we have noted, there are also close ties with persons from the same dialect group. Persons who speak the same dialect come from the same island region. They share not only a dialect, but also family ties and histories, customs, points of view.

Pilipinos are not likely to be "loners." On rare occasions extreme rage may drive a Pilipino into solitude, but only for a brief time. Even when there is no trauma, the family's support is essential. As expressed by one Pilipina, "We don't go it alone. We need someone to pat us on the back and say, 'you're doing fine, keep it up.'"

The events of life are celebrated by the family and are usually observed for their religious significance.

WOMAN'S PLACE

Although Spanish rule of the Philippines encouraged dominance by men, the position of Pilipinas has been one of strength. Women in the Philippines have the vote and they can own property. In the Pilipino tradition women are the family money managers. Most activities, however, are not delegated by sex role; who does what is a decision based more on practicality than on sex. Tending the house and children is not considered "woman's work"; nor is the world of commerce thought unsuitable for women. The participation of Pilipino American women in the U.S. labor force is the highest of any group of women. This reflects both the independence of women and the influx of Pilipinas with professional training.

Among Pilipinos respect is linked to age, not sex. In some Pilipino dialects there are no such words as "grandmother" or "grandfather"; there is only a single word, "grandparent." Only when clarification is needed is a second word used to indicate a male or female grandparent. The importance of women in the Pilipino culture is also reflected in the word for "uncle." Unlike some Asian languages, there are no different Pilipino words to distinguish a maternal uncle from a paternal uncle. All uncles are of equal status.

"MA'M" AND "SIR"

Beginning with the family, Pilipinos are taught defererice to authority. During a lifetime those authorities will include parents, older sibiings, clergymen, teachers, employers, law enforcement personnel and other government officials. In the traditional culture one may take action only with the clear approval from those in authority. While other cultures may

encourage individuality, initiative and innovation, the Pilipino culture encourages conformity. The child's duty is to respect and obey the adult. The adult's duty is to perform without questioning the tasks given him. Decision making is a prerogative of rank. Young Americans may be surprised when elder Pilipinos address them as "sir" or "ma'm" as a way to maintain distance, or because the Americans are identified with some government agency. This is particularly awkward for Americans who prize equality of all persons, and for those who respect all elders.

The situation may be further complicated by the speech patterns of the two cultures. While Americans use volume to emphasize a word or an idea, Pilipinos have other ways, such as the position of a word in a sentence. To the Pilipino ear, then, American speech may sound gruff or sharp when there is no such intention.

SPACES BETWEEN THE CIRCLES

The closeness of the Pilipino extended family circle and the respect for authority leave great spaces between a Pilipino and persons outside his/her circle. The formality found in other Far Eastern cultures has an added dimension in this culture. Relationships between circles are rather delicate -- like communications between neighboring countries. Protocol is carefully observed; intermediaries are often employed; face-to-face confrontations are avoided. It is of utmost importance among Pilipinos to maintain smooth interpersonal relations. Pilipino sociologists even refer to this value by initials -- calling it SIR. To avoid friction, Pilipinos constantly employ courtesies, amenities and personal diplomacy with peers and the prestigious. They tend to be very generous, even extravagant, in praise of others and in hospitality. It is best never

to refuse these generous offers. To refuse would offend the giver.

THE RULE OF RECIPROCITY

Another cultural feature, one which governs relationships outside extended family circles, is the practice of reciprocity. Each favorable action by one person toward another results in an obligation to reciprocate. Sometimes the debt is paid in goods, sometimes in intangibles, such as loyalty. A relationship is out of balance until the debt is paid. It cannot be allowed to remain in great imbalance, except in patron-like situations. Imagine the situation of a Pilipino group seeking sponsors for a dinner event. If one group member is well acquainted with a grocer he would ordinarily make the request for the group. However, if he is already indebted for other favors, he may decline, asking that someone else take that role.

Furthermore, a favor done by one member of a family puts all family members in good standing with the "debtor." We have referred to the extended family as the primary social unit. It is also the primary unit of economics (e.g., contacts for jobs, sales) and politics. The saying, "it's not what you know, but who you know that counts," is nowhere truer than among Pilipinos.

THE ENJOYMENT OF LIFE

We have noted how the regard for authority leads to restraint. A Pilipino American job applicant, when asked about his work experience may be unduly modest. Yet, Pilipinos generally

enjoy conversation. Among friends, Pilipinos show their ability to enjoy life. The company of friends brings great pleasure; a sense of festival prevails with teasing, laughter and music as usual ingredients. At these times the stereotype of Asian reserve and inhibition could not be further from the truth.

Pilipinos relish life. While television commercials try to sell us on "going for the gusto," Pilipinos do it naturally. Touch, sound, taste, smell, and sight are not only sources of information, but of pleasure, too. For example, an expression of intimacy and love among Pilipinos is feeding one another, using no utensils, only hands. Other Americans very seldom use this expression; sharing the first piece of wedding cake, or feeding a baby are rare exceptions.

THESE, THEN, ARE SOME OF THE EXPERIENCES AND VALUES OF PILIPINO AMERICANS.

The group called "Pilipino Americans" includes old men who spent their lives in bent labor; children and grandchildren of Navy families, and recent immigrants with advanced academic training. It includes persons who live according to the ways which we have referred to here as "the Pilipino tradition" and persons who do not.

This booklet is made available as an educational service by:

The Los Angeles County Commission on
Human Relations
320 West Temple Street, Room 1184
Los Angeles, California 90012

The text was written by Carole Chan, with research assistance by Betty Gabonia. Both are members of the Commission staff.

The Commission extends its thanks to Pilipinos who granted interviews and to these persons who reviewed the text and offered comments and suggestions:

Dr. Milagros Aquino, Associate Professor of Education, California State University, Dominguez Hills

Mrs. Jeanne Abella, Project Director, Search to Involve Pilipino Americans

Felicidad V. Cordero, student of sociology

Mrs. Adrienne Cedro-Hament, staff member, Balitaan (Pilipino community newspaper, Los Angeles)

Royal Morales, Project Director, Asian American Community Mental Health Training Center

3/76